



How to

**Work
With
Coalitions**

...The Best Start Experience

One of a series of
“How to...” resources developed by
Best Start: Community Action For Healthy Babies

The “How To” Series

The Best Start “How To” resources were developed to help you work with specific audiences. Participation from the audience you want to reach is critical in creating effective initiatives. Young mothers, small business owners, students, physicians and other community members have unique and important skills. However, they are often busy people and their time needs to be respected and input valued. There are many commonalities when working with different audiences. However there are also considerations and challenges specific to each. The “How To” series will help you involve different groups and individuals in your work.

September 2000

HOW TO . . . Work With Coalitions

Why Work with Coalitions?

A coalition is a group of different organizations and or individuals that come together to work on a common goal. Coalitions have many different strengths. Certainly there is strength in numbers. A group of people has more skills, insights, ideas, time and money than a single individual or organization. A coalition is a unified community voice, showing that many groups and individuals are concerned about an issue and are working together toward solutions.

Coalitions are a good way to share the work if many people in a community are concerned about the same issue. They can help organizations collaborate through increased service coordination. Gaps in service can be identified and addressed. Coalitions are an especially useful way to deal with complex concerns that involve many services in a community. They also provide an opportunity for people affected by the issues to have a voice and to become involved in the process of change.

Comments on Coalitions

Coalitions take on a life of their own and cannot and should not be controlled by any one agency or individual. They are an opportunity to work together in new ways, establish new partnerships and to look at valuable work that may go beyond the scope or role of an individual agency. While

coalitions can take on large tasks and provide a powerful united voice, they do not always move quickly or smoothly. It takes time to discuss issues and reach agreement on initiatives. Groups of individuals need to learn to work together. An ongoing effort must be made to effectively communicate problems, concerns, ideas and plans.

Best Start and Coalitions

Best Start worked with coalitions to improve maternal newborn health in several different communities. Coalitions guided Best Start, building capacity and mobilizing communities around the many risk factors that contribute to low birth weight. Although Best Start coalitions all worked towards improving maternal newborn health, each focused on different initiatives, responding to needs and concerns in their community.

The Best Start coalitions included a range of service providers and individuals interested in the issues. Mothers, teens, nurses, physicians, business owners, health promoters, teachers and many other concerned citizens were active on the coalitions. Because of the broad community input, Best Start was able to address actual, rather than perceived needs of the communities. Between 1991 and 1998, over 1500 people contributed to the work of Best Start.

Due mainly to geographic differences, coalition structures varied within Best Start.

In general, each coalition consisted of several subcommittees that concentrated on an individual risk factor and a planning committee that organized all of the work within a geographic area. The subcommittees worked on initiatives and reported to the planning group. The planning group, in turn, guided and coordinated the work of the subcommittees, ensuring a coordinated community approach to maternal newborn health.

COALITIONS CAN HELP YOU

- Share information
- Make new contacts
- Get input from a variety of sources
- Minimize duplication and competition
- Address gaps in service
- Solve problems
- Do community planning
- Plan and launch initiatives
- Share initiative costs
- Work towards a common goal
- Accomplish things that go beyond your mandate
- Work on large tasks



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THE BEST START EXPERIENCE

In this section of the booklet you will hear how Best Start worked with coalitions on maternal newborn health. By involving communities through coalitions, Best Start was successful in identifying and addressing local issues of concern. The stories demonstrate the range of roles that can be taken on by coalitions and how, by working together, you can improve the reach and quality of initiatives.

FORMING A COALITION

Getting People on Board

In one community, Best Start started building a coalition by asking for suggestions from existing staff members and by looking through the local service directory. In the directory we searched for programs, groups and organizations whose mandate aligned with Best Start's work. We put together a list of possible candidates.

Next, letters introducing the purpose and benefits of the proposed coalition were sent to organizations, inviting them to participate. The letters were followed by a phone call. If the individual sounded remotely interested, personal visits provided additional information and face-to-face contact. Each

candidate was given an orientation package about Best Start and a draft vision statement. We emphasized that the contribution of each person would be valuable.

Many people stepped forward to be a part of our work. Agencies were key in identifying individuals from the audience of interest and in involving them in the coalition. Only two months later the Body Image coalition had twelve members, the Empathy Belly coalition had eight members and the Workplace Health coalition had ten members. There were also four coalition members who were interested in the administration and overall planning of Best Start. As a result, we were

very busy planning and initiating projects. Within a year our initiatives took off like wildfire and overall participation grew to over 200 volunteers.

Insight:

There are committed people wherever you are. Blanketing the community worked, not only for finding volunteers but also in heightening awareness of the issues. Face to face follow up to the letters paid huge dividends. Service providers can help you find and involve community members in a coalition.

DEFINING THE COALITION

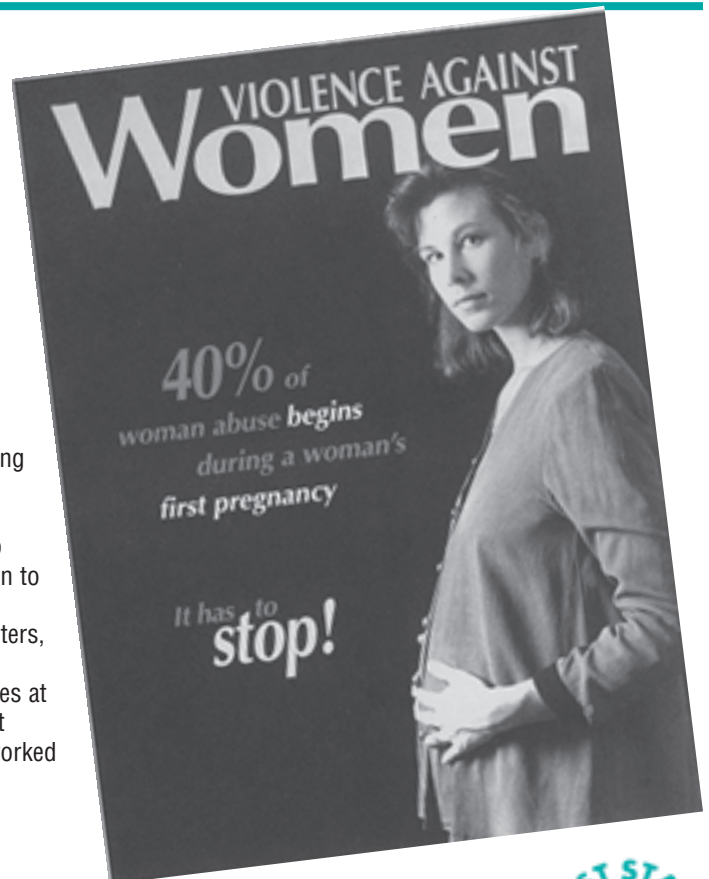
Learning to Work Together

We invited an experienced community advocate for women who were victims of violence to make a presentation. This training event brought people together around the issue of woman abuse. About forty participants spent the day identifying issues and needs in the community. At the end of the day more than twenty people indicated an interest in building a community coalition focused on zero tolerance to violence against women.

One of the things that made this coalition exciting was that key individuals showed an interest in working together. Members of the legal and medical community, emergency services, service providers, community agencies and consumers were willing to participate. From the outset, this group was well intentioned and committed

to positive change. This coalition was looking like a success from the very beginning.

We were so anxious to move forward that we jumped right into planning activities. The group wanted to create a standardized protocol to make it easier for women to access services. We proceeded to create posters, do surveys and invited women to tell their stories at coalition meetings about what had and had not worked for them.





This caused concern for some agencies. A small number felt they were portrayed in a negative light. They did not see it as an opportunity to collectively improve how the community provided services for abused women. We talked through this, but lost some members in the end. We reviewed our steps, deciding that it was time to develop a mission statement, goals and objectives. We realized, in hindsight, we should have spent more time developing a common vision.

The coalition still stands to this day. Numerous women's groups across the province have reproduced the coalition's orientation package on woman abuse. The coalition continues to be the lead organization in local celebrations of International Women's Day. Members are often contacted by the media to provide perspectives on current issues. The coalition plays a strong advocacy role for women in the community.

Insight:

A networking day with a good speaker is an excellent way to get people excited about an issue. Asking for volunteers before the end of a networking day gains people's commitment. Activity based work keeps people involved. However, take the time to define and structure your coalition, before moving to action. It is very important to lay the groundwork by agreeing on a mission, goals and objectives.

BUILDING CREDIBILITY

The Body Image Resource Centre

A coalition decided that they would like to develop a body image resource centre. This huge vision was somewhat daunting to the newly formed coalition. There were many critical steps to accomplishing it and its success involved a lot of support from the community. A crucial point was to encourage a partner organization to become a stakeholder by offering free space to house the centre.

The coalition identified that we needed to gain credibility before an established organization would take us seriously and offer space. We agreed that we would first have to work on

other, smaller projects. We started a peer support group and organized a resource library through an adopt-a-book program.

The preferred organization to host the body image resource centre was a child & youth agency because they were established and credible and they worked with young people. In addition, through the Body Image Resource Centre, we could help them offer an extra service to youth without incurring any additional staff-related expenses. By the time we actually approached the agency, we had no problem selling the coalition or concept of the Resource Centre. In fact, the

Executive Director was so impressed with the group's commitment and work that he agreed to donate space.

Insight:

To gain credibility for larger initiatives, start with small ones that are easy to do and provide visibility in the community. By working on smaller projects first, it will help you learn to work together and define the role of your coalition. Think big, and work gradually towards your vision.



FULFILLING A VISION

Pregnancy Support Program

One spring day in 1997 our office received yet another call from a distressed pregnant woman in need of baby supplies. Although it was not our role to offer these services, other service providers in the community repeatedly referred people to us. Staff discussed needed community services for women in poverty. The manager thought a pregnancy resource centre would be a valuable service. Further discussion brought us to the concept of a “swap shop” where people would be able to shop for used baby clothing, furniture and other items. Access to healthy food during pregnancy, especially for women living in isolation and poverty, was also an issue in the community.

Best Start brought together community members who were interested in prenatal services to discuss gaps in local services for low-income pregnant women and ways that we could meet those gaps. The local food bank was the first partner that Best Start approached. Later, representatives from the hospital, the health unit and interested community members joined us. These partners took ownership of the issue and formed a steering committee.

Getting the committee members to agree on values and beliefs was an important part of the mobilization process. Committee members felt that although they did not

have funding for a full pregnancy support program, there was enough community interest to start with a core program. The hospital provided a room, grocery stores donated food and nurses volunteered their time. MotherCare opened its doors as a fully volunteer-driven model.

Later on, the MotherCare steering committee successfully submitted a proposal to the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program for ongoing funding to support and enhance the service. This funding helped build the program to a weekly drop in service with food and an educational component. The MotherCare program is open to women who are pregnant or who have babies up to six months of age. About forty needy pregnant women attend the program each week. Due to the success of this model, other communities in the area expressed interest in developing similar programs. Today there are seven funded MotherCare sites in the county. A “Next Step” project was initiated to continue to provide support to women who were “graduates” of MotherCare.

Your choices during pregnancy make a difference

avoid tobacco smoke • attend prenatal classes • see your midwife or doctor • laugh
• laugh • choose healthy foods • contact your health unit • walk • visit your midwife •
• inform yourself • exercise • • avoid alcohol • laugh • relax
• relax • see a midwife or doctor • relax • laugh often
laugh • visit with friends
• walk • • inform yourself
• rest • avoid drugs •
• relax • rest often •
laugh • exercise •
walk often •
• rest often •
avoid drugs •
avoid alcohol •
inform yourself •
• see your midwife •
• be good to yourself •
• attend prenatal classes • • see your doctor •
• choose healthy foods • visit friends • laugh •
• rest • develop a birth plan • avoid tobacco smoke • walk • see your doctor • laugh
• contact your health unit •

Create a Circle of Support

Sponsored by Best Start Barrie

Insight:
Spend time planning and agreeing on values, beliefs and direction before you proceed to initiatives. Try to build sustainability into your initiative. If funding is not available, look for ways to develop community support for your issue or program. Be ready to help other communities take on your successful initiatives.

MODIFYING A DREAM

“Support Centre” to “Centres of Support”

We decided that we wanted to develop a drop in support centre for pregnant women. A coalition of interested agencies and volunteers was called together. One person felt strongly that a centre would not work. She believed we did not have enough “needy” pregnant women to warrant such a centre. Because of her position and the skills she brought to the coalition, we felt it was important for her to be involved, although she made it clear from the start that she disagreed with the goal of the coalition.

The coalition went through several planning exercises to clarify its vision. We wrote a letter of intent to a funding organization. The letter was successful and we received approval to develop and submit a full proposal. However, one member still did not

support the concept. We wrote the proposal but because there was not agreement, we finally decided to abandon the proposal.

After a few months had passed, the coalition met again. We talked about what work we could all support. After much discussion, we decided to look at many “centres of support” rather than a single “support centre”. We wanted to improve resources and services at many locations in the community.

We made lists of the resources at each location, including libraries, health unit, clinics and parent resource centres. We then purchased replacement books, posters and models for those in poor condition or that were out of date. We also purchased

resources the services said they needed. The coalition developed a brief user-friendly service directory related to pregnancy for agencies and pregnant women. We felt we had made progress as a coalition and finally had a unified voice. We never returned to the idea of a support centre.

Insight:

Look at common ground and decide what activities or initiatives you can all agree to support. Focus on what would work well in your community and brainstorm the best way to improve support for pregnant women. A diversity of viewpoints within a coalition can be enriching. Do not proceed without agreement as a coalition.

INPUT FROM THE INTENDED AUDIENCE

Pre-Testing Prenatal Posters

A coalition, mainly made up of service providers, decided to develop a poster about healthy pregnancies. Before coming up with draft designs or messages, the coalition wanted to have a better idea of what caught the interest of women in their reproductive years. It is difficult to gather women in their reproductive years for focus testing. The women may be pregnant and tired, very busy with young children, or may be working. We found the best way to test resources was to go to existing groups at Toy Libraries, Resource Centres or other drop in type programs. The women were happy to answer questions and to look at draft resources.

Eight posters developed by other organizations were presented to three groups of women. The comments were consistent and interesting. The women preferred a poster that showed a group of people gathered around a pregnant woman. Everyone looked happy and supportive. The

colors were warm. The text was short, to the point and used a positive voice. The women felt it was the sort of poster they would stop to read.

Interestingly enough, the coalition favored a different poster. The poster they liked best was the one the women least preferred. It was a gray and white poster showing four pregnant women. Red circles with lines through them indicated things pregnant women should not do, including smoking, alcohol, drugs and X-rays. The groups of women who reviewed the resources felt that this poster was preachy and negative. It made them feel annoyed. They said they would not stop to read it. The service providers liked it because they felt the message was clear.

Being a community development project, the coalition decided to listen to, and learn from women in their childbearing years. What they like to look at, what they are

interested in reading, what makes them receptive to change, is important. This pre-testing exercise showed how easily the coalition could have designed a resource that did not appeal to the intended audience. The information gathered from this pre-testing process was valuable and was used in many more ways than anticipated. The comments helped the coalition come up with the first draft of their poster, and were used when initiating other projects.

Insight:

Asking women what they liked and disliked was helpful prior to decisions about messages and images. Don't rely on input from a group that is not the intended audience. A resource that annoys the audience or does not interest them is not going to be helpful. Pay attention to your audience, they know what works for them.

WORKING TOGETHER

Signage about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

One coalition wanted signage in licensed establishments regarding the effects of alcohol on pregnancy. We felt the first step was to get local businesses to support the idea of signage. Eventually, once awareness had been raised in the community, we planned to propose that the signage become mandatory.

A list of places that served alcohol was drafted. The list was long, especially considering the small size of the community. As a municipal councilor commented, "There is enough licensed seating for every man, woman and child, plus all the dogs in town."

The coalition talked with three people who worked in restaurants and bars about the proposed alcohol and pregnancy signs. The signs needed to be bilingual, resistant to vandalism, and easy to install securely on a

wall. We came up with a draft script and design after reviewing signage used in other communities. Our signs stated, in English and French, "Drinking alcoholic beverages during pregnancy can cause birth defects."



Letters about the signs were sent to restaurants, bars and community centres. We encouraged the owners of the licensed establishments to act as caring members of their community

by requesting and posting the signs. The signs could be posted at the point of purchase or in male and female washrooms. The coalition was disappointed that only three locations responded.

A few months later the coalition sent a second letter to restaurants and bars, again

encouraging them to request and put up signs. As expected, there were no responses to the letter. One week after the letters were mailed out, we called each owner. As a result of the phone calls, all but 2 licensed establishments agreed to put up signs about alcohol and pregnancy. These restaurants and bars were also thanked for their participation through an ad in the paper. Follow up phone calls indicated owner satisfaction with the signs, little vandalism, and no negative feedback from their clientele.

Insight:

Raise community awareness and commitment to the issues before moving to policy. Talk to others to find out about their concerns. All coalitions encounter discouragement from time to time, but look for ways to persevere. Use early adopters and personal contact to help convince others to make changes.

Recipe For a Good Coalition

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 raison d'être ("reason for being")
- 1 or 2 dozen voices
- 1 comfortable, open forum
- 1 plan of action
- 1 plan "B" (in case the first one fails)
- 1 lb. of leadership
- a pinch of humour
- a dash of enthusiasm
- 10 gallons of patience
- 1 ripe political climate (optional but certainly makes things go faster)
- 10 lbs. of perseverance (if climate isn't ripe)

NOTE:

When making this recipe, don't be afraid to add more humour and enthusiasm anywhere you think it is needed.

*This recipe can be easily doubled or tripled.
(Boston and Miceli 1995)*

DIRECTIONS:

- Using many hands, mix the first 5 ingredients together.
- Pour into a bowl and let meld together in a warm place.
- Throw in a pinch of humour and a dash of enthusiasm.
- Let the attainable goals rise to the top.
- Divide into small manageable parts.
- Have the 1 or 2 dozen voices spread the word and keep the message burning and the paper churning.
- Keep the temperature hot in a ripe political climate.
- Cover completely with perseverance in a cool climate.
- Mix with a little luck and timing.
- Bake until completed or well done.

HOW TO WORK WITH COALITIONS

Bringing People Together

Having the right people at the table is crucial to the success of a coalition. Invite people who work directly or indirectly on your issue, with the networks and skills needed to support the work of the coalition. This could include representatives from schools, business, the media, health, service providers, community champions, young parents or government. Think about who would be interested in the issue, who could make a difference, and who has the needed skills to contribute. Most importantly, make sure that the coalition includes people affected by the issues.

An ad in the paper or on the radio can raise awareness about your coalition and encourage people to participate. If you would like a certain group to participate on your coalition, write them a letter. Ask them to consider sending a representative from their organization. Follow up by phone and encourage them to be involved in some way. If you have an individual in mind, contact them and arrange to talk in more detail. Once you have a core group assembled, they can help you think of other people who could be approached.

As initiatives evolve, you may need new people for new tasks or to take the place of coalition members who are no longer able to participate. Recruiting coalition members should be seen as an ongoing task for a coalition.

Training the Team

As new coalition members are recruited, they will need an orientation to the issues and the work of the coalition. Take time to talk to each new member about the purpose of the coalition and its accomplishments to date. Provide them with the vision, goals and objectives, previous minutes and information about the issue of concern. Let them know about the other coalition members.

If this is a new coalition, a training event may help ensure that everyone has a good understanding of the issues. Periodic training may be necessary to help individuals or the coalition take on new tasks.

Involving the Community

Even if your coalition has a good cross section of interested service providers and concerned volunteers, you may not have all the input you need to complete your work. Coalitions also need to gather information from surveys, talk to the audience of interest and get input on draft resources. A coalition should be seen as a tool to involve the community, rather than the voice of the community. A coalition still needs to ask the audience of interest what their concerns are and how they can best be addressed.

Determining a Vision

Before starting on any initiatives, it is important to discuss the vision of the coalition. Although this can be frustrating for a group of action-orientated individuals, it will help you define the coalition, its purpose and approach to the issue. Let each member talk about what they think the coalition can accomplish. Look for common interests and concerns. Then clearly define what you want to achieve in the long term. Once everyone agrees, you can discuss how you will accomplish your vision through short-term goals and objectives and individual activities.

Balancing Planning and Action

It is critical to balance planning with actual initiatives. Planning is a continuous and important process for a coalition. However, many participants will need to see some action in order to feel the coalition is worthwhile. It is possible to start with small easily agreed on projects to build confidence and ownership while taking time to work methodically through the development of goals and objectives.

Organizing the Coalition

After setting the framework for the work of the coalition, talk about how you will share the tasks. Deciding how to select a chair, how often to meet, who will take minutes and set the agenda are necessary tasks. It can be helpful to also define a few ground rules, for example respecting others,

avoiding side conversations etc, especially with a diverse coalition. Discuss how to allocate the work, taking advantage of skills and interests on the coalition. Some individuals may be interested in planning and overseeing the project; others may want to be involved in individual activities. Get to know people on the coalition and find out about their skills and interests.

Discussion on the best way to work together will help individuals in a new coalition become a functional group. Members will be more likely to feel that they have a say in what happens, that they are respected and that they are an important part of the coalition.

Resolving Conflict

Coalitions can expect to experience some problems along the way. Regardless of the magnitude of the problem, deal with it as soon as possible. Denying the problem is not helpful. It does not take long for even minor problems to escalate. The longer you

QUICK TIPS

- Respect the opinions and experiences of everyone at the table
- Ask about the best location and time to meet
- Have a clear agenda for meetings
- Look at ways to involve people who don't have time to attend meetings
- Make it easy for them to be involved
- Learn about different members
- Hold an awareness event to develop interest in the community
- Ensure agreement on what you want to accomplish
- Deal with problems promptly
- Provide food at meetings

HOW TO . . . Work With Coalitions

wait, the more difficult it will be to resolve. The best way to address a problem is to face it immediately, openly and honestly.

Start by admitting that there is a problem. Talk about your concerns and ask others how they feel. Listen to their perspective and talk about possible solutions. Focus on finding a solution rather than on laying blame. Occasionally, an impartial facilitator may be required to help you work through the problem. Although problems in a coalition are uncomfortable to deal with, resolving them will make your coalition stronger.

Evaluating the Work

Evaluation provides key feedback to a coalition. A carefully designed evaluation defines the successes and barriers in each stage of an initiative. Evaluation results can help you select and develop future initiatives. For evaluation to be effective, a coalition needs to have a clear idea of what they want to change and how it can be measured. Evaluation is everyone's responsibility. Decisions about how to evaluate an initiative should be made before taking action.

Coalitions may want to set aside time periodically to ask themselves how they are doing. Have a few simple questions ready and allow each member to talk about what they like about the coalition and any changes that might improve the way you work together. It can be an opportunity to reassess or redefine partnerships and roles.

Sharing the Results

Successful approaches, interesting survey results and useful resources should be shared with other groups working on the same issues. Designing effective initiatives takes time and money. By sharing your work, you can make it easier for another group to make an impact in their community. Consider mailing information about your work to others, posting a sample on a website or writing an article for an issue specific newsletter. Make it part of your plan to provide others with samples or electronic versions of any resources you develop.

Ending the Partnership

As a coalition grows, a few initial participants may find that they are no longer needed, and that their tasks are finished. Similarly, a coalition may find that it has completed its work. Be ready to thank coalition members who feel they are ready to move on to something else. Continually evaluate the purpose and effectiveness of a coalition. Communities change and there may be a time when there is a more effective way to accomplish the work or the tasks of the coalition may be finished. You may want to discontinue the coalition and to look at new ways of working together.

SUCCESSFUL COALITIONS

- Respect and trust other members
- Are seen as a leader and have a unique role
- Have a good cross section of members
- Include those effected by the problem
- Share a vision
- Have attainable goals and objectives
- Have a good understanding of the issue
- See the benefits of the partnership
- Can compromise
- Feel they own the work
- Have an equal say
- Are flexible
- Develop clear roles
- Provide training
- Communicate clearly and frequently

FINAL COMMENTS

This booklet offers you tips, stories and insights about working with coalitions, based on the experience of Best Start. Coalitions are an effective way to promote health and to mobilize communities. Bringing concerned and committed people together around an issue such as maternal newborn health is a powerful way to look at long-term change. By asking, respecting and involving those affected by the issues you can impact actual needs and implement effective solutions.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

Best Start resources

Here is a list of Best Start resources which may be of interest to you. To order these resources call 1-800-397-9567 or visit our website www.beststart.org

A Guide to Developing Partnerships with Business

Best Start Interventions Inventory

How to Build Partnerships with Physicians: The Best Start Experience

How to Build Partnerships with Workplaces: The Best Start Experience

How to Build Partnerships with Youth: The Best Start Experience

Insights from Best Start

Prevention of Low Birth Weight in Canada: 2nd Edition

Working Together: Forming Project-Based Alliances in the Non-Profit Sector

Other relevant sources of information

AHEC/Community Partners - *From the Group Up: A Workbook on Coalition Building and Community Development* Tel. 413-253-4283

Amherst Wilder Foundation - *Collaboration Handbook*
Collaboration: What Makes it Work
Tel. 651-642-4000

Amherst Wilder Foundation website: www.wilder.org/pubs

Centre for Health Promotion website: www.utoronto.ca/chp/

Civic Practices Network (CPN) website: www.cpn.org

Community Development Society website: <http://comm-dev.org>

Community Tool Box website: <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu>

Health Canada - *Community Action Pack* Tel. 613-957-2991

Heart Health Resource Centre website: www.web.net/heart/

OHPE Bulletin #152.1 - *Developing Leadership to Sustain Community Coalitions* website: www.ophe.web.net/index.cfm

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food - *Effective Community Decision Making* Tel. 1-888-466-2372

Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition website:
www.opc.on.ca/ohcc/

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care -
Community Mobilization Manual
Community Health Promotion in Action
Tel. 416-327-4327

OPC - *Building Effective Coalitions Trainer's Manual*
Community Action Handbook
Factors Influencing the Success of Collaboration
Tel. 416-408-2121

OPC website: www.opc.on.ca/pubs/index.html#hp

Sustainable Communities Network website: www.sustainable.org

Tools of Change website: www.toolsofchange.com

US Foundation and Fundraising Coalitions Resource website:
www.idealists.org

Please feel free to copy all or part of this brochure.

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How to contact Best Start

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Best Start: Community Action for Healthy Babies is a unique health promotion project funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. It is a comprehensive population-based model for improving maternal newborn health through community development. Two locations, Algoma and Barrie, were selected by the Ministry to develop and demonstrate the Best Start model. From 1992 to 1998 the two sites worked with their communities on areas of concern to maternal newborn health. They were supported and guided by the Best Start Resource Centre in Toronto.

Best Start addressed a wide range of factors that contribute to the birth of low birth weight babies. Low birth weight as a health indicator lends itself to a community wide approach and Best Start initiatives were directed at the entire child bearing population. Poverty, smoking, substance abuse, violence, nutrition, stress and workplaces, all have a significant effect on the health of an unborn child and were a focus of Best Start's work. Best Start brought together agencies, services and individuals to form working groups on local concerns. The community groups were involved in selecting, designing, implementing and sustaining initiatives that increased awareness, provided support and addressed policy.

The Best Start Resource Centre continues to offer support to individuals and groups working on maternal newborn health in Ontario. Best Start services include on-site consultations, training, facilitation of planning, telephone support, information, resources, and a web site.